

Mystic
Egyptian
Polytheism



A Guide for Beginners

Mystic Egyptian Polytheism



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By

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Dedication



Online communities are often a boon for those looking for comradery in uncommon subjects of study. I must thank the members of these digital communities, many of whom I don't even know first names. Thank you for your kindness. Thank you for your time. Thank you for your guidance.

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§.1 What is this guide?



This is a succinct introduction to practicing Egyptian polytheism with elements of late antique mysticism. The “Egyptian” aspect includes the Pharaonic, Ptolemaic, and Roman eras of Egyptian polytheism. I also use modern Egyptian folk elements and middle eastern occultism, but these are beyond the scope of this guide. The “mystic” aspect focuses on Hermeticism and Neoplatonism as polytheistic religious philosophies. I primarily pull from the *Hermetica*, Diotima’s “Ladder of Love” in *Symposium*, the “three theurgical virtues” in the *Chaldean Oracles*, and religious philosophy from Iamblichus’ *On the Mysteries*. If you don’t know what most of these terms mean, don’t worry—by the end of this book, you’ll understand how it all comes together in a practical way.

This guide will go over everything you need to begin practicing, including simple how-to instructions for specific rites. Reading this guide will help you understand the logic behind devotional acts and how to perform them, what sorts of spiritual principles you can use to inform your religious life, and where to look to keep building your praxis.

There is no unambiguous, complete account of the theologies of all the temples and traditions across Egyptian polytheistic history. Today's knowledge is backward-engineered from reading and interpreting abundant collections of hymns, prayers, poetry, and religious literature. They are grouped into different constellations of context that are suggestive of many interpretations. My way is not the only way to practice Egyptian polytheism; ancient and modern scholarship support this interpretation, but I arranged this particular instance of praxis. I offer you a model to follow. Use your judgment and take from it what you will.

This guidebook is organized to make it easy to follow from one concept to the next, with each section leading into the following. In some sections, I have produced a specific list of recommended texts for further reading, arranged in the order of priority. At this book's end is a complete list of texts I've used to inform this praxis and a glossary for core terms.



S.2

How do you begin to embrace faith?



How do you enter into a polytheistic faith of the ancient Mediterranean? There are no preachers in the street to extol it, and there are no longer any temples with religious professionals to ask for guidance. Finding polytheism takes a certain kind of luck, and practicing takes a great deal of investment. Without institutional guidance, you must be prepared to create your praxis and build upon it after long periods of autonomous learning, sharing, and deliberation. You must learn to make temples in your heart and find instructors in the gods themselves. What could motivate someone to do all that?

My entryway into faith was through personal religious experience. I grew up in an irreligious household, so I had no initial concept of what “being religious” was like. One day I was researching Ancient Egyptian religion for a writing project, read some Greco-Egyptian mystic texts, tried a meditative prayer based on the prescriptions in said texts, and went through a strong religious experience while in prayer. This religious experience spurred me to try prayer again, and soon I was praying every day. In other words, my entry into faith is deeply personal and has little to do with “convincing, logical arguments” or “living traditions of my local community.”

That collection of Greco-Egyptian texts is called the *Hermetica*, and its religious, philosophical school is classical Hermeticism. Its texts are composed of a mix of Egyptian theology and Greek religious philosophy, written throughout the Ptolemaic period into the Roman period in Egypt. It is connected with various other traditions, one being the school of Neoplatonism, which shares specific philosophical characteristics.

The Hermetic and Neoplatonic schools generally share a high regard for “intuition” (an inexplicable experience of a strong impression of “knowing”) as the dominant form of knowing above logical and sensory powers. One of the best ways you become closer to the gods is through visceral, divine experiences, sometimes described as receiving “gnosis”—meaning a sort of personal, divinely conferred “knowledge.” Hermeticism and Neoplatonism are considered “mystical” or types of “mysticism” for this reason.

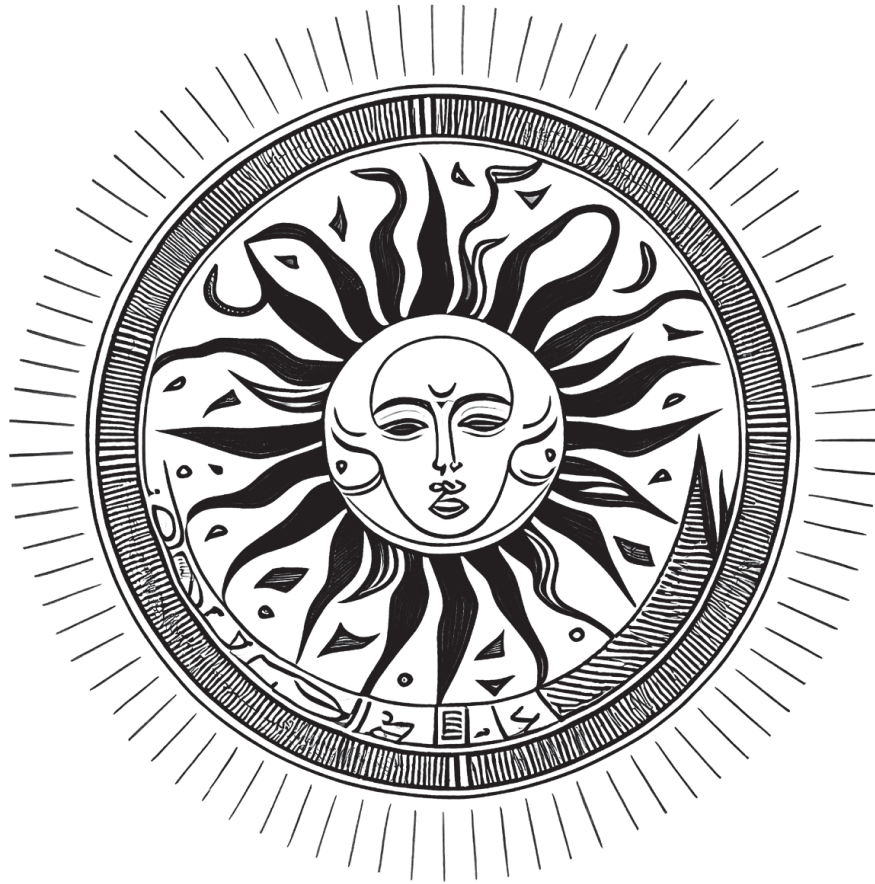
I interpreted my intense religious experience from prayer as receiving “gnosis” by worshipping in the style these mystic, Greco-Egyptian texts recommended. For this reason, I first chose to study polytheistic mysticism. Because the Ptolemaic and Roman periods were the last in which Egyptian religion was widespread, I worked backward into the Pharaonic period. Several concepts within Neoplatonism and Hermeticism are represented in the old hymns and religious literature from the New Kingdom period in Egypt, thus establishing a continuity of religious thought. This is how I eventually developed a praxis around what could be called “Mystic Egyptian Polytheism.”

Finding faith principally in the heart gives you a consistent and meaningful motivation to support every step of your spiritual growth. I began with this tremendous feeling I received from prayer. It carried me through learning about religious philosophy, theology, history, sacred rites, and all the relevant literature surrounding Egyptian polytheism. If I could make one recommendation on “how to begin,” it would be to look to find faith in your heart.

If you currently do not feel a strong personal connection to the Egyptian style

of religion, try a meditative prayer I call the “Silent Prayer.” For years, this “Silent Prayer” was the only ritual part of my praxis, so if you do no other rituals, do this. **Go directly to S.14 to try it out for yourself.** The purpose of this practice is to elevate one’s soul towards the divine and seek the peace and wholeness of reunion with the gods by this elevation. The “Silent Prayer,” among other “elevating” rituals, is at the heart of this pursuit. This book focuses on using these practices to fulfill one’s connection with the divine.

All this talk of entering into faith has been absent thus far of one crucial thing—the gods themselves. When I say that I found faith in the gods through my experiences, what is a “god” in the first place?



§.3

What are the gods and the myths?



Fables therefore imitate the gods, according to effable and ineffable, unapparent and apparent, wise and ignorant; and this likewise extends to the goodness of the gods; for as the gods impart the goods of sensible natures in common to all things, but the goods resulting from intelligibles to the wise alone, so fables assert to all men that there are gods; but who they are, and of what kind, they alone manifest to such as are capable of so exalted a knowledge. In fables too, the energies of the gods are imitated; for the world may very properly be called a fable, since bodies, and the corporeal possessions which it contains, are apparent, but souls and intellects are occult and invisible. Besides, to inform all men of the truth concerning the gods, produces contempt in the unwise, from their incapacity of learning, and negligence in the studious; but concealing truth in fables, prevents the contempt of the former, and compels the latter to philosophize. But you will ask why adulteries, thefts, paternal bonds, and other unworthy actions are celebrated in fables? Nor is this unworthy of admiration, that where there is an apparent absurdity, the soul immediately conceiving these discourses to be concealments, may understand that the truth which they contain is to be involved in profound and occult silence.

Sallust, On the Gods and the World CH. III, trans. T. Taylor

You might have already read a few ancient myths and stories about the gods. They are depicted as super-powered people with bodies, emotions, desires, and flaws. It is easy to imagine them like a cast of characters or actors in a sitcom, often fighting with each other or the world itself.

The gods, however, are not in a time or place. They are not super-sized people hanging out in another dimension. They are eternally at work in the “First Moment,” a time beyond time. They are Powers, Souls, Minds, and Ones who undergird reality itself and beyond. Their anthropomorphic forms with discernable characteristics are derived from our human perspective. Our stories of the gods come from generations of inexpressible experiences of divine contact. They are our attempt to construct a sacred knowledge around what is, paradoxically, unknowable to us in this mundane state of existence.

We do not know the names of the first prophets of the gods since they lived before recorded human history, but the names and attributes of the gods have been derived from their religious experiences and observations. Generations of religiously intuitive people have constructed our knowledge of the gods across thousands of years of human religious exploration.

Some may ask, “How do we know there really is a deity called Anubis?” and so on, but I think this line of thinking misses the mark. This is essentially looking for material evidence of immaterial causes, looking for rational explanations of super-rational entities. Empiricism is the wrong tool for the job we’re trying to do in spiritual exploration and mystic union.

The purpose of mythology is also somewhat different than other religious traditions. Some religious traditions have their mythology also operate as history; that is to say, the events in their religious stories are true literally, allegorically, symbolically, and anagogically all at the same time. The literal accounts of the ancient myths are not themselves religiously relevant. Absurdities in mythological stories are each a sign of a *hidden*, unifying truth.

To read an ancient myth “allegorically” means to find the representative, metaphorical, and coded meanings within the story. A “symbolic” reading is inspiring, elevating, or communitive. When you find nodes within an ancient myth that retain multi-layered meanings, this is “symbolic.” A text’s “anagogical” meaning is intuitive, magical, and unitive. When the ancient myth instills a value or belief in you, or you gain profound insight from it, it can be said to be “unifying.” Any one of these lenses for religious reading are appropriate. Only a literal lens is inappropriate.

Text Recommendations for Further Exploration

- ψ Jeremy Naydler’s *Temple of the Cosmos: The Ancient Egyptian Experience of the Sacred* is my top text recommendation for further exploration of this topic. It dives deep into how the ancients envisioned the gods and proposes how the various Egyptian cosmologies can be reconciled.
- ψ Jan Assmann’s *Egyptian Solar Religion in the New Kingdom: Re, Amun and the Crisis of Polytheism* focuses on New Kingdom theology by analyzing and comparing religious literature. Assmann fleshes out a kind of “monistic polytheism,” as well as a robust culture of personal piety that is reflected most prominently in the religious literature of this period. He shows how New Kingdom religious thought was an antecedent to concepts in Hermeticism and Neoplatonism.
- ψ Moustafa Gadalla’s *Egyptian Divinities: The All Who Are The One* provides a modern Egyptian analysis of the gods, including reviews of the most significant deities. Although Gadalla is not an academic, his insights and contributions as a native Egyptian Muslim with sympathies towards the ancient religion are valuable.

When we consider these religious lenses for reading myths, we may ask how we came to understand the gods this way. How did we get gods with names and mythologies, and distinct characteristics? How did God and man meet?

§.4

How did polytheism begin?



There is no universal explanation for the origins of polytheism. I think religion began with “religious experiences” as incidents of divine contact. Due to their goodness, those receptive individuals experienced communion with higher divine powers. Alone, their experiences were likely just as confusing as any other inexplicable religious experience. However, together with other spiritually intuitive people, they could discern the gods’ characteristics by inspiration and consensus. Over many generations of religious contest and living, they developed the first priesthoods and temples, the institutions which preserved our knowledge of the gods across generations.

This long chain of transmission was disrupted out of spite by new religious groups that developed in the Mediterranean. However, we have the same capacity to add to these ancient traditions if we choose. We can continue the work our ancestors started at the dawn of humankind.

To put breath into a tradition requires that we have some knowledge of the core ideas of that tradition. Since we are addressing Egyptian polytheism more specifically, what did the Egyptians believe was significant about the divine? What ideas were running through Egyptian minds in the golden millennia of ancient religion?

§.5

How to think like an Egyptian.



For the demiurgic intellect, who is master of truth and wisdom, when he comes to create and brings into the light the invisible power of the hidden reason-principles, is called Amoun in the Egyptian tongue, when he infallibly and expertly brings to perfection each thing in accordance with truth he is termed Ptah, when he is productive of goods he is called Osiris, and he acquires other epithets in accordance with other powers and activities.

...And thus it is that the doctrine of the Egyptians on first principles, starting from the highest level and proceeding to the lowest, begins from unity, and proceeds to multiplicity, the many being in turn governed by a unity, and at all levels the indeterminate nature being dominated by a certain definite measure and by the supreme causal principle which unifies all things.

Iamblichus, On the Mysteries VIII.3, trans. E. Clarke et al.

The most important thing to know about Egyptian religious thought is that the Egyptians were not monocausal regarding the divine, despite adhering to the concept of divine unity. Metaphysical phenomena, which

undergirds material reality overall, are not subject to the rules of material reality as it appears to us. This metaphysical space lies between the divine unity and the material world. This means that divine causes between our material existence and the ineffable divine unity can be polycasual—stemming from many different deities simultaneously.

For example, all gods have the power of creation, so all gods are the “Creator God.” All gods have a manner in which they have created the cosmos from their perspective, and all of those mythologies are true simultaneously. The gods are completely unique and completely united. Each deity deserves individual respect and devotion, yet each in every sense is equal in “rank” to the others. Even local or minor deities received the “Greatest God” moniker in Egyptian religious literature.

If you have read some ancient mythologies, you may have the impression of a “chain of command” or hierarchy among the gods. Such-and-such a deity is the father, this is his wife, and these are their sons and daughters. Sometimes a deity is attested to “contain all the other gods.” The Egyptian gods operate in “constellations” or groups of divine powers that constitute and undergird the cosmos, and their “relationships” with each other are symbolic. The gods are not literally “married” to each other in the sense of two embodied people sharing a life together, but metaphorically work in tandem as divine powers. In Egyptian theology, the gods are multiform and transmutational, changing their “appearance” and often turning *into each other*. In this regard, it can be said that the gods “enact distinct performances,” but no god is “greater” than another in a meaningfully qualitative manner—they share an essential “godhood.”

There are varying interpretations of Egyptian cosmology and no strict “orthodoxy,” but one consistent cosmological feature is the divine unity called the Nun. This primordial, unknowable “dark sea” is a singular, ineffable font for existence itself. It overflows and emanates the gods and every form of existence. Iamblichus, a polytheistic theologian from the 200s C.E. educated in Egyptian religion, illuminates the simultaneous unity and individuality of the gods within

this divine unity in Book VIII of *On the Mysteries*. The gods are entirely unique and entirely unified—all at once.

Think of a deity as a gateway or portal that reveals a complete and unique view of the divine unity. If you think of it in these terms, it can be said that each deity is a particular and complete view of God from different “angles” and “sides.” This view of the divine is such that it allows for a great diversity of gods (which people experience) and for those gods to have unique and perceptible characteristics by the religiously sensible (theurgists, priests, oracles, diviners, worshipers, etc.). It also convenes them all in divine unity. This view does not mean that every religion is considered “equally correct” or “basically the same,” but it does accommodate every discerned and characterized deity.

Ma’at, often translated as the concepts of “Justice,” “Order,” “Truth,” and the “Good Civilization,” is the crowning religious value of the Egyptians. The material realm (physical reality) is a mirror of the heavenly realm (metaphysical or an imperceptible, higher reality), which is the “true image” of the cosmos. Upholding Ma’at means creating “The Good Civilization” by striving for unity—first of the self and then others in larger circles of family, friends, associates, and communities. Pursuing unity increases the fidelity of the material world to the heavenly one, which it is meant to reflect. By starting with your sense of personal unity and moving outwards into more significant relationships, you increase the clarity of the reflection that is our physical world. We must work towards an ever-fidelitous reflection of the perfect yet imperceptible heavenly image.

The Egyptian soul has many parts, but the most important is the “Ren,” the “Heavenly Name.” A “Ren” is like a divine “code” that makes a soul unique, which takes the form of a string of names. An easy way to imagine this is to think of the relationship between a video game character rendered on a screen, to the data file from which it manifests. You and your soul are different levels of a rendered character on a screen, while your “Ren” is a series of 1s and 0s inside a computer file. In this regard, the “Rens” are the “source codes” of all things. When praying in

the Egyptian style, you will be invoking the sacred names of deities, which you can understand as “ritual identification” and acknowledgment of the “Heavenly Names” of God.

Text Recommendations for Further Exploration

- ψ Jan Assmann’s *The Mind of Egypt: History and Meaning in the Time of the Pharaohs* is my top text recommendation for further exploration of this topic. It illuminates Egyptian theology by exploring their ideals, values, mentalities, belief systems, and aspirations from the Old Kingdom period to the Ptolemaic period.
- ψ Garth Fowden’s *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* identifies the Egyptian character of religion and wisdom in late antiquity and provides a cultural and historical context to the *Hermetica*, a collection of Greco-Egyptian religious texts.
- ψ Christian Bull’s *The Tradition of Hermes Trismegistus: The Egyptian Priestly Figure as a Teacher of Hellenized Wisdom* provides a rich assessment of the Egyptian religious landscape at the end of widespread polytheism in Egypt and how it came to interact with and be codified in Greek schools of thought and their writings.

As a crossroads of Africa, Asia, and Europe, Egypt has always been a center of religious syncretism and development. Many Egyptians developed theologies and religious philosophies throughout the ages, and one of the most prominent schools of thought in late antiquity, before polytheism declined in Egypt, was “Neoplatonism.” This is essentially the philosophy of Plato, developed and exegetically unfurled into a school of religious mysticism.

S.6

How To Think Like A Neoplatonist



*One is Amun, who keeps himself concealed from them
who hides himself from the gods, no one knowing his nature
He is more remote than heaven
he is deeper than the underworld.*

*None of the gods knows his true form
his image is not unfolded in books
nothing certain is testified about him.*

*He is too secretive for his majesty to be revealed
he is too great to be enquired after
too powerful to be known.*

*People fall down immediately for fear
that his name will be uttered knowingly or unknowingly
There is no god able to call him by it
He is ba-like, hidden of name like his secrecy.*

De hymnen aan Amon van Papyrus Leiden I 350, trans. J. Zendee

In polytheistic practice, one can supplement theology and mythology with religious philosophy. In antique times, there were schools of thought like Neoplatonism, Stoicism, and Epicureanism, among others. Neoplatonism is the one I use to understand *why* we should pray and *what exactly we are doing* when we worship or perform devotional acts. At the beginning of this book, I mentioned how Neoplatonism and Hermeticism have a lot in common. Still, one thing that sets Neoplatonism apart is that it is a fully systematized account of metaphysics. While the *Hermetica* is fragmented, many Neoplatonic texts survive in completion. Neoplatonism helps us, in this case, by acting as a lens to see worship.

Religious philosophy typically espouses a spiritual goal—a reason for doing prayers, performing rites, and leading a religious life. The main point of religion in Neoplatonism is to unite or align one’s soul with God, especially the highest inference of God, called “The One.” The One escapes definition due to its ineffability. Thus our task in seeking union with the One is a mystical process of “defining the undefinable,” “knowing the unknowable,” and so on. In Neoplatonism, pursuing oneness with God is often called *henosis*, which means “union.” My impression, however, is that this union is not attainable while the soul is embodied, and thus the religious work we do in pursuing union is a kind of preparation for death.

The One is at the core of Neoplatonism as a school of thought. A good way to envision what it means to “pursue unity with the One” is that it is a process of removing misunderstanding about the One. All the activities of religion, contemplation, and worship should serve as a means to distance yourself from illusions of separation and realize instead that there is only One. Unity is true. Everything else constitutes the great journey to fulfill this truth.

The most significant ethical value in Neoplatonism can be summarized as “self-unity.” Self-unity is meant to undergird one’s disposition as a moral presupposition to the traditional Platonic virtues of Wisdom, Courage, Temperance, and Justice. Consider these virtues with the mindset that maintaining or improving unity in oneself and others is the chief aspiration that sits behind them. While mystic union

with God is the overall goal, it's important to remember that this pursuit of unity can and should appear in our everyday thoughts and conduct.

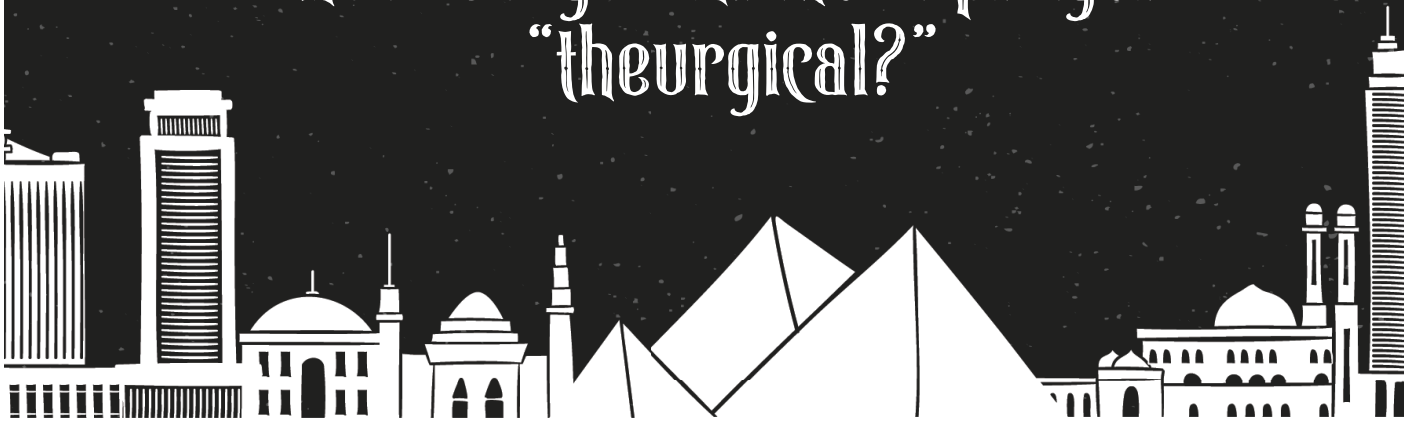
Text Recommendations for Further Exploration

- ψ Radek Chlup's *Proclus: An Introduction* is my top text recommendation for further exploration of this topic. It addresses the Neoplatonic system of Proclus but gives an excellent overview of Neoplatonism generally. It contains many valuable graphics and charts that help illustrate the main ideas within Neoplatonism.
- ψ John Opsopaus' *The Secret Texts of Hellenic Polytheism: A Practical Guide to the Restored Pagan Religion of George Gemistos Plethon* succinctly addresses several concepts in Neoplatonism from the point of view of Gemistos Plethon, a crypto-polytheist who lived during the final years of the Byzantine Empire. It provides insight into the practical application of Neoplatonism to ritual and religion.
- ψ Algis Uzdavinys' *Philosophy as a Rite of Rebirth: From Ancient Egypt to Neoplatonism* draws connections between theological concepts and practices in Ancient Egypt to those represented in the writings and practices of the Neoplatonists.

When we set aside time for prayer, we do so to achieve unity. How does one thing unify with another? One way to describe this process is by becoming more *like* the thing with which one aspires to unite. Thus, when we pray and worship, we are thought to be *pursuing likeness* of the divine, and by the pursuit of likeness, we produce divine realities. This concept is referred to as “theurgy.”

§.7

What is “theurgy,” and how do you make a prayer “theurgical?”



In the case of entities of differing substance such as soul and body, and of heterogeneous entities such as forms in matter and those which are in whatever way separate, their natural union comes about as something acquired from the realms above, and subject to loss over definite periods of time. The more we ascend to the heights and to identity with the primal entities in form and essence, and the more we raise ourselves up from particulars to universals, the more we discover the eternal union that exists there, and behold it as pre-eminent and dominant and containing about it and within it otherness and multiplicity.

Iamblichus, On the Mysteries I.19, trans. E. Clarke et al.

Theurgy is when we “imitate” the gods’ eternal actions in religious rites, like praying at a temple, shrine, or altar. The ancients who established this philosophy of worship used prayer materials derived from the living temples of their time. In other words, the historical prayers we see in museums, written as hymns on papyri and steles, were the same ones they used in their personal piety practices, only seen through this specific lens of theurgy.

Hymns in ancient times were structured in various ways—invoking the deity by its sacred names, conferring adoration and thanks, requesting friendship and favor, and promising piety. Not all prayers contain every one of these elements, but all certainly involve at least one. Find a prayer you like and look for these elements.

1. **Invoking a deity by its sacred names**, duties, and properties is how you open *yourself* to the divine and pursue likeness to it. Speaking these names, duties, and properties aloud allows you to call your soul to attention so that it can be more sensitive and open to the elevating effects of the rite. This remains true for the theurgical interpretation as well. When unity with God is the goal, one of the most critical parts is identifying and affirming God to instill in yourself this singular purpose.
2. **Conferring adoration and thanks** has more nuanced, specific meanings in a “theurgical” understanding. When you extol the majesty of a deity in prayer, you must imagine *yourself* as the deity extolling and thanking yourself. Imagining yourself as the deity, adulating yourself, or giving thanks to yourself, allows you to play the role of God’s self-acknowledgment. These are forms of identifying, similar to invoking the sacred names of a deity, and thus retain equal importance.
3. **Requesting friendship** with a deity retains the same meaning in a theurgical interpretation. Establishing sympathy with the divine allows the soul to align with God. Beseeching the gods and their messengers for sympathy and affinity hopes to establish a closeness between you and God.

4. **Promising piety** and making other kinds of vows in prayer are meant to establish a sacred affirmation of worship in a theurgical interpretation. Again, you imagine yourself as the deity, promising continued devotion to yourself. This identifies and affirms the pursuit of unity.

Text Recommendations for Further Exploration

- ψ Jeffrey Kupperman’s *Living Theurgy: A Course in Iamblichus’ Philosophy, Theology and Theurgy* is my top text recommendation for further exploration of this topic. It is a practical guide on theurgy, complete with straightforward explanations of theurgical concepts and contemplative exercises for practice.
- ψ Gregory Shaw’s *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* demonstrates how Iamblichus used religious ritual as the primary tool of the soul’s ascent towards God. He lays out how Iamblichus proposed using rites to achieve *henosis*.
- ψ Algis Uzdavinys’ *Philosophy and Theurgy in Late Antiquity* explores the various ways theurgy operated in the prime of its widespread usage. He focuses mainly on temple rites and how theurgy helped translate them into personal piety rituals.

As a closing metaphor, an easy way to see prayer through a theurgical lens is to imagine it as a martial art or a dance. The gods perform eternal actions, like creating and sustaining forms and giving structure to all levels of being. Although these things in their complete totality are beyond human comprehension, we can mimic their creation and sustenance symbolically in rites. We gain likeness to the gods by placing ourselves in the grooves their movements have carved into the heavens. Our “mimicking motions” are done in the form of the prayers we speak and rites we perform, as well as in the devotional activities we do, which we will reflect upon next.

Practical Advice for Application

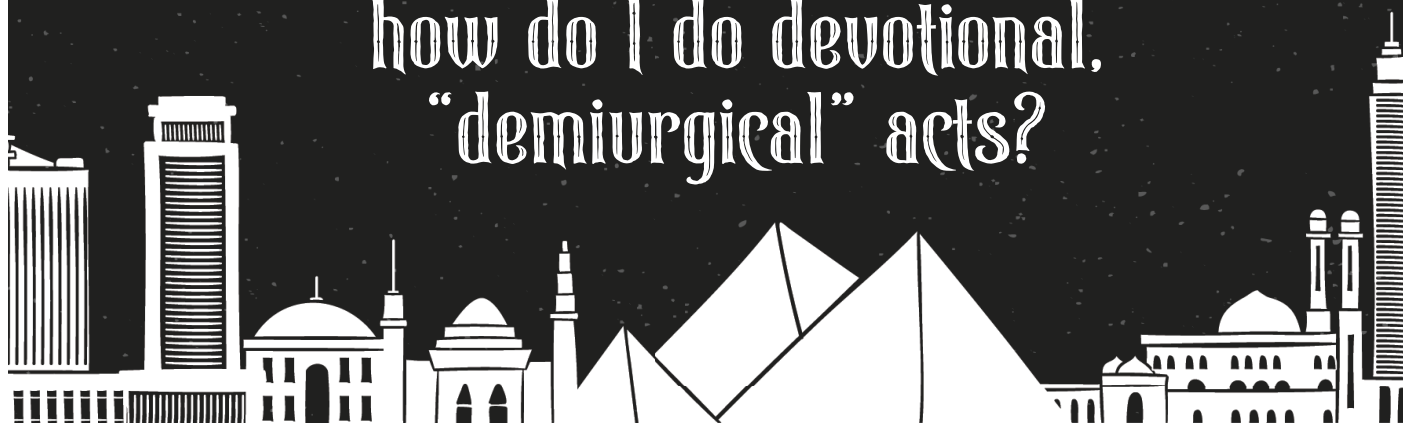
- ψ Whether writing your own prayers, using historical ones, performing them in the original language, or performing them in your native language, remember to imagine yourself as an actor, playing the role of the deity to whom your prayers are addressed.
- ψ Concepts like divine names, identification, adoration and thanks, requests of friendship, and promises are all important parts of Egyptian-style prayers. Every prayer should have at least one of those elements, but not all of them are required all the time.

If we are “mimicking the gods’ eternal actions,” how can we apply this outside the scope of prayer sessions? How do we expand our “divine mimicry” to encompass more of our activities?



§.8

What is “demiurgy,” and how do I do devotional, “demiurgical” acts?



The following difficulties require the same theosophical Muse for their solution, but first of all, I would like to explain to you the mode of theology practiced by the Egyptians. For these people, imitating the nature of the universe and the demiurgic power of the gods, display certain signs of mystical, arcane and invisible intellections by means of symbols, just as nature copies the unseen principles in visible forms through some mode of symbolism, and the creative activity of the gods indicates the truth of the forms in visible signs. Perceiving, therefore, that all superior beings rejoice in the efforts of their inferiors to imitate them, and therefore wish to fill them with good things, insofar as it is possible through imitation, it is reasonable that they should proffer a mode of concealment that is appropriate to the mystical doctrine of concealment in symbols.

Iamblichus, On the Mysteries VII.1, trans. E. Clarke et al.

Prayer and rites are essential to religious practice, but in mystic Egyptian polytheism, so is performing devotional acts. A devotional act is any activity outside of direct prayer with a religious purpose and significance. What makes “demiurgy” unique as a type of devotionism is that it is principally concerned with the act of creation. Like theurgy, to mimic the gods and pursue likeness, one must participate in creativity as a lesser version of God’s creation. Producing, crafting, constructing, and creating are all acts that mimic the “Demiurge” or “Creator Deity.” In Egyptian theology, *all* gods are the “Creator Deity,” so no matter which gods you worship, part of that worship should be creating things after their fashion.

The main point of demiurgy is to create in the style of the deities’ domains to whom you are most devoted. To use a specific example, take deities who are scribal, or are masters of wisdom, philosophy, or the arts & sciences—Thoth, Seshat, Neith, Sia, and Isis, are prominent examples of these sorts of deities. In various ways, their heavenly activity involves the creation and maintenance of knowledge and the concepts of learning and exercising skills in all disciplines. A demiurgical act to mimic the creative aspects of these deities would most straightforwardly involve the practitioner writing their own texts. These deities are often depicted in myth as writers themselves, so the production of writing can be said to be within their domain. Adjacent activities, like re-binding old or soft-covered books to preserve them better or beautifying covers and the front edges of books to increase their tactility and wonderment, are also appropriate. Acts of charity, such as volunteering to read to children at a library or tutoring others in arts & sciences, are also demiurgical acts. As long as you are putting creative energies into the domain of knowledge and wisdom, you are “mimicking” the deity.

Text Recommendations for Further Exploration

- ψ Shannon Grimes’ *Becoming Gold: Zosimos of Panopolis and the Alchemical Arts in Roman Egypt* is my top text recommendation for further exploration of this topic. It constitutes an in-depth look at Zosimos—an Egyptian Hermetic priest, scribe, metallurgist, and alchemist. It explores alchemy (ancient chemistry and metallurgy) as material rites of the soul’s ascent. She shows how Zosimos believed that partaking in these practical arts produced divine realities and spiritual advancements.
- ψ Alison M. Robert’s *Hathor’s Alchemy: The Ancient Egyptian Roots of the Hermetic Art* delves deep temple inscriptions and corresponding religious literature from the Pharaonic period and demonstrates them as premises for alchemy. These texts “alchemize” the “body” of the temple, offering a model for the “alchemizing” of the self.
- ψ A.J. Arberry’s translation of Farid al-Din Attar’s *Muslim Saints and Mystics: Episodes from the Tadhkirat al-Auliya* contains a chapter on the Egyptian Sufi saint Dhul-Nun al-Misri (sometimes rendered as Dho ‘l-Nun al-Mesri). He is regarded as an alchemist, thaumaturge, and master of Egyptian hieroglyphics. It contains apocryphal stories of his ascetic and mystic life as a way of “living demiurgically.” It is an insightful glimpse into how the Ancient Egyptian arts continued into new religious paradigms long after polytheism was no longer widespread in Egypt.

Consider this principle of creativity-as-it-applies-to-domain, and you will see demiurgical opportunities in almost anything. A critical thing to remember is that seeing these activities through a religious lens should affect how you do them. When you work demiurgically, you do so with devotion in mind, engage with creativity morally and ethically, and do so in the earnest pursuit of excellence and likeness to God. Here are some examples of different sorts of demiurgical acts, common types of creative activities that most people can engage with and interpret in a religious capacity.

- ψ Writing texts. - ψ Producing handicrafts and artisanal pieces. - ψ Restoration and repair of the insufficient, old, or damaged. - ψ Illustrating, sculpting, and producing visual art. - ψ Dancing and performing arts. - ψ Producing videos and digital media. - ψ Composing, producing, and playing music. - ψ Woodworking and blacksmithing. - ψ Alchemy and other occult arts.	- ψ Programming and web design. - ψ Producing research in science and medicine. - ψ Engaging in architecture, engineering, and building. - ψ Teaching and tutoring students. - ψ Parenting and child-rearing. - ψ Animal husbandry and horticulture. - ψ Nursing, therapeutics, and surgery. - ψ Culinary arts and cooking. - ψ Sports and bodybuilding.
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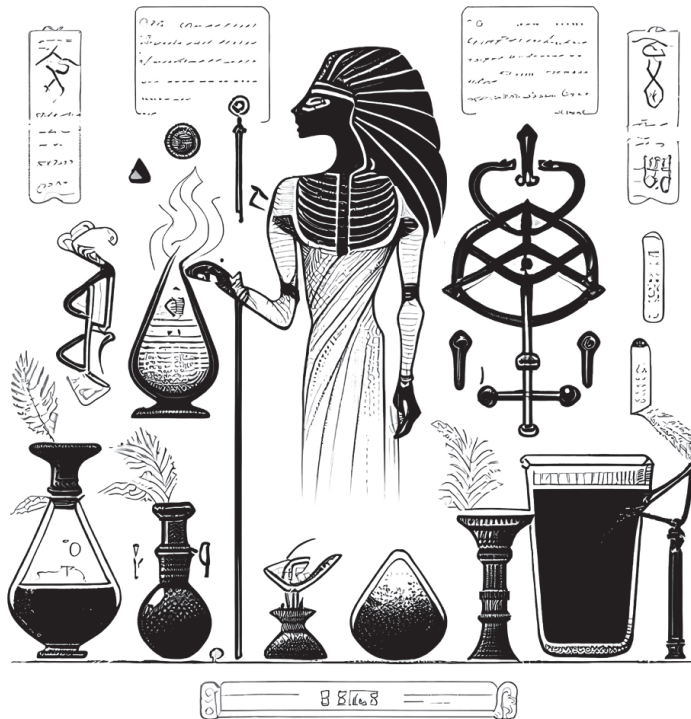
These are great, practical ways to engage with the concept of demiurgy. But we established before that in Neoplatonism, the overall goal of religious activity is unity. It seems like theurgy and demiurgy should have clear step-by-step instruction that shows how we are meant to go from mundane material to the spiritual heights of oneness with God.

1. **Begin “ritualizing” your activities** by reflecting on the types of activities, hobbies, arts, sciences, or other disciplines you are either interested in pursuing or engage in already. What do you want to be good at? What are you good at now?

2. **Select as many of these activities as you want** to “ritualize.” Get the appropriate supplies and make other preparations to engage in these activities meaningfully.
3. **Attain a basic level of competence.** The goal is to get to some level of autonomy, independence, and creativity in whatever activity you’re working on.
4. **Establish a consistent schedule.** Practice your choice of activity. Do so with ethics and morality in mind—accept “self-unity” as a core principle by which you proceed toward excellence.
5. **Establish practical goals for yourself.** How do you become meaningfully better and more knowledgeable in this activity? What instructional or helpful reading materials can you obtain, and how will you use that knowledge to inform your craft? Can you find a teacher or tutor?
6. **Produce and share.** Create finished products to share, critique, collect, and represent real progress. Create the parameters for yourself of what “completion” of one work entails.
7. **Be mindful of God throughout the process.** Contemplate how the divine operates in your activity. Find connections between your chosen activity and the sacred. What symbolic or unifying connections can you make between your activities and the gods and their discerned characteristics?
8. **Devote contemplation and prayer towards the gods** who bring you higher. As you gain more insight into your activity, so will you gain more insight into the gods whom those activities mimic. Mimic the eternal actions of the gods in prayer.

9. **Transfer your experience in prayer to your activity.** Begin to transform your activity into a type of prayer. When you experience feelings of excellence and unity, embrace them. If you don’t experience those things, learn to see them in your activity and choose to open your heart to your potential for excellence.
10. **Let the gods work through you in your activity.** Trust your creative intuition.

A teacher, Diotima, from Plato’s dialogue called *Symposium*, used the metaphor of a ladder to describe how one ascends from the material to the mindful to the unitive. You begin with matter as the first step, which evolves into more complex, mindful contemplation as the second step, and ends up focused upon the gods as the third step. These steps correspond to different types of religious rites, which are meant to elevate the soul in different ways. All of them are necessary to pursue union with God. These rites are how we organize what we do in theurgy and demiurgy into easily understood categories.



S.9

What are the types of religious rites?



The three categories of ritual are “material,” “mindful,” and “unitive.” These are not rigid categorizations, nor are they explicitly laid out in any surviving ancient text, but instead, they are derived from Diotima’s “Ladder of Love.” Using these categories of ritual, we can more easily organize a praxis of theurgy and demiurgy in a straightforward manner.

Material rites are religious rituals performed with material offerings. These include offerings of food or drink, symbolic or sacred objects, incense, or ritual body movements. These are typically given at a shrine or altar before icons of a deity or deities. This usually comes to mind when you think of physical rituals performed in temples or before altars in ancient Mediterranean polytheism. For those more familiar with Abrahamic religions, you have engaged in a material rite if you have done the salat or the eucharist before.

Mindful rites are religious rituals performed with immaterial offerings. These include spoken hymns, prayers, adulations, music or chanting, or invoking self-created religious symbols aloud. Contemplating symbolic or religious symbols, ideas, and schemas in a religious setting is also a mindful rite. These are typically recited or contemplated at a shrine or altar before icons of a deity or deities. Still,

they can also be fulfilled in the context of an educational discussion.

Unitive rites are religious rituals performed in mimicry of the ineffable. This takes the form of silent, meditative prayer. The silent, meditative prayer aims to achieve “ecstatic union,” or the feeling that you are united with God. It requires no incense, music, poems, additional prayers, food offerings, or religious offerings of any kind—just you, alone, in silence.

Practical Advice for Application

- ψ When building your praxis, leave a space for each type of rite. All of them do not have to be performed each day, but each should be a part of the sum of your religious practices.
- ψ I have built my religious observation schedule around performing each of these rituals every day. In the morning and evening, I perform the material and mindful rites; in the afternoon, I perform a unitive rite. More details about my daily worship schedule can be found in **S.13-S15**.

This structure of ascending rites partners well with a Neoplatonic mystic poem called the “Chaldean Oracles,” of which we only have pieces and fragments. This text introduces virtues of the ascent of the soul in a set of three, so just as there are three types of rites, there are also three types of virtue that help the soul ascend. These virtues can be referred to as the “Chaldean Theurgical Virtues.”

S.10

What are the “Chaldean Theurgical Virtues?”



(It is necessary)... to propose the virtues which, from creation, purify and lead back (to God), “...Faith, Truth, and Love,” that praiseworthy triad. “For all things are governed and exist in these three (virtues),” (says the oracle). For this reason, the gods counsel the theurgists to unite themselves with God by means of this triad.

Julian the Theurgist & Julian the Chaldean, Chaldean Oracles Fragments 46 & 48, trans. R. Majercik

Succinctly, the “Chaldean Theurgical Virtues” are Faith, Truth, and Love. Each virtue follows a pattern from the **material to mindful to unitive** in an upward path towards unity with God, a framework I mentioned before called Diotima’s “Ladder of Love.”

Faith is the virtue connected to God’s extant perfection. The vehicle used for faith is purified worship, meaning that one must pray to fulfill the virtue of faith.

1. **The first step is engaging in material rites.** That means part of one’s praxis should be establishing an altar with iconography, incense, offerings, and other

material religious objects and tools.

2. **The second step of faith is engaging in mindful rites.** This means memorizing or reading prayers aloud, reciting them to yourself or others, and singing hymns should be part of one’s practice.
3. **The final step is doing unitive rites.** That means silent, meditative prayer should be something you engage in as well. When you complete all three types of rites, you are “climbing the ladder” of faith.

Truth is the virtue connected to God’s extant wisdom. The vehicle used for truth is purified philosophy, meaning that to fulfill the virtue of truth, one must read, contemplate, and discuss philosophy.

1. **The entryway to engaging with philosophy is by thinking about our mundane sensory experiences.** Philosophy is, after all, couched in mundane observations or ideas concerning existence, time and space, theories of knowledge, and how one should conduct oneself. This is a stage of recognition of the concept of truth.
2. **The next step in pursuing truth by philosophy is the rigorous application of logic and reasoning.** This usually means expanding these initial ideas into whole systems that account for various problems arising when you explore a philosophical topic. Operating at this level includes learning formal philosophy and applying philosophical principles or ideas to your daily life, habits, and encounters.
3. **The final step of embodying truth is developing one’s intuition.** Intuition, an inexplicable “feeling” or “impression” one gets for an environment, person, circumstance, or experience—is a “sense” that is on the fringes of human understanding. It may very well be that something like psychological “flow states” and “eureka moments,” where one experiences an inexplicable focus or excellence when performing an activity, is also a kind of intuition. Embracing intuition means accessing an inexplicable sense of the singularity of purpose or aligning one’s soul with the divine to produce “knowledge” of excellence. To

fully engage with truth, one must develop one’s sense of intuition.

Love is connected to God’s extant beauty. The vehicle used for love is purified passion, meaning that to fulfill the virtue of love, one must experience this state of being in pursuit of ecstatic love. You engage the intense feelings of love that humanity often experiences towards the end of union with God. Love is what Diotima talks about in *Symposium*.

1. **The first step of love is the desire for “bodies.”** This is not necessarily “bodies” in the sense of sensual desire for a person, but “bodies” in the mind of mundane and not obviously religious interests. This usually boils down to a visceral connection with something—a hobby, a skill, a discipline, a project, or practicing an art & science. This entails whatever demiurgical activity to which one finds themselves attracted.
2. **The next step of love lies in taking a demiurgical activity and applying virtue.** That means practicing, learning, and researching how to perform at higher skill levels and professionalism. Pursue excellence in that which one is passionate about, and become an expert. Mastery is the end of exercising virtue in this regard.
3. **The final step in love is embodying God in one’s passions.** This means capturing one’s expertise and excellence into great works and performances. Pursue greatness to increase the fidelity of the reflection of the material world to its true, noetic image. This boils down to sharing your work with others in any appropriate capacity. Completed artifacts of love act as powerful signs and symbols which elevate and inspire others.

Practical Advice for Application

- ψ Understand your religious obligations as (1) prayer and worship, (2) reflection, contemplation, and study, and (3) devotional acts. If you can accommodate these three types of activity in your daily life, you can be said to be abiding by these virtues.
- ψ Even though each virtue has “steps,” it is vital to take all of the steps all of the time. That is to say, you are never “finished” with material rites, and you never “stop at” unitive rites. Diotima’s “Ladder” is something we are meant to climb and re-climb all the time.

These virtues are an excellent guide to understanding the expectations you should have for living piously. Still, thus far, we have not talked much about a critical aspect of ancient polytheism—the gods themselves. The gods guide these virtues since we aspire to be united with them. How do you select a deity or deities to worship, and how can they help elevate your understanding of the theurgical virtues?



§.11

How do you select a deity, and what is an “Elevating Triad?”



In ancient times, there were various ways in which you would select deities to worship. Some gods were obligatory, like honoring the patron deity of the reigning king or of the city in which you live. Others might be related to your profession or if you had a family member who served a specific temple as a religious professional. There were also various levels of commitment, ranging from casual engagement in a deity’s public worship or regional festivals, to deep personal piety with a devoted shrine and daily responsibilities.

Deity selection in modern times has no straightforward “orthodoxy,” so most modern polytheists often use intuition and affinity. That is to say, because we have access to extensive collections of mythologies and domains of the gods, we select the deities for worship based on our natural sensibilities. A more explicitly demiurgical deity like Ptah may be appropriate if you work in construction. If you enjoy writing as a hobby, Thoth may be a good choice. If you practice magic or are interested in the occult, a deity like Isis may be suitable. There is no minimum or maximum of gods you must worship, and just like in ancient times, it is ok to be more devoted to some deities and to worship others in less formal ways.

One helpful feature of Egyptian polytheism for the practice of theurgy and demiurgy is the concept of a “divine triad.” Historically, Egyptian triads were common as arrangements at the city and region level, symbolic of powerful unions of various divine powers and their living temples. We can use this triad structure to help us accomplish our theurgical and demiurgical goals in modern times.

We have three theurgical virtues, which can be led by three “elevating deities,” each of which will help act as a guide for one of the virtues. Deities you may select for Faith, for example, are those deities who are said to command leadership among the gods. These may be gods like Amun-Ra, Osiris, Horus, and Ptah. Deities for Truth may include those known for exceptional wisdom, such as Thoth, Seshat, Isis, and Neith. Deities for Love involve those of beauty and protection, like Hathor, Bast, and Nephthys. Many deities overlap in these categories. It could be just as sensible to include Anubis as a deity of Love because he beautifies the dead or Set as a deity of Faith because he commands great divine strength.

The gods you select for your “elevating triad” will act as the guides you use to engage the three theurgical virtues. That means you will use their mythologies, the characteristics attributed to them, the associated signs and symbols, and the ancient hymns and literature about them to explore the theurgical virtue you have decided to follow within that particular deity.

Once you have selected the deities you will use to engage the three theurgical virtues, how do you bring your praxis to life? Looking back at Diotima’s “Ladder of Love” from before, we know that everything begins with the first step of materiality. In this case, that means acquiring and arranging iconography of the gods and constructing a personal religious space, typically called an altar or shrine.

§.12

How do you set up an altar?



An altar is a sacred space you arrange and assemble, reserved for religious rites and observations. Anything upon an altar is a religious tool to aid in receiving the divine. Generally, it can be said that the things on your altar fall into two categories; “agalmata” and “sunthemata.”

An **agalma** is an image, statue, ornament, book, or object of the activity of worship. This can take the form of ritual icons and religious tools.

A **sunthema** is a token, symbol, or “seal” of the gods that one finds in nature that are used in material or mindful rites as offerings or topics of contemplation. These can be in the form of stones, gems, minerals, shells, animals and their parts, plants, flowers, sounds, rhythms, melodies, incantations, lights, numbers, and ineffable names of the gods.

When it comes to composing your altar, countless styles are available. My personal preference is to keep it as simple as possible.

A **washing bowl** for consecrated water to lightly wash one’s face and hands. I use a pinch of natron (a type of salt) and a few drops of nard oil (an aromatic) in my water.

Offering bowls for making food and drink offerings. The offerings within the bowls can be consumed after the prayers and rites are completed. My personal offering bowls are small and copper.

Material offerings of symbolic significance are related to the discerned characteristics of the deities you worship. All things considered, “sunthemata” or “agalmata” for the gods can be offered on an altar. I have vials of natron, Greek and Egyptian coin currency, artisan dice, ostrich feathers, a stone-carved turtle, a 3D-printed prismatic slug, a hawk skull made of resin, and a few artisan-made Egyptian games like Senet and Seejeh.

Icons of deities or important religious figures are a staple of altars. They can be illustrations, statuettes, or other similar visual depictions. I have wooden statuettes of Amun-Ra, Bast, Thoth, and an ankh. I have polystone icons of Anubis and Ptah.

Sacred texts like ancient theological treatises, religious philosophy, mythological accounts, ancient hymns, and other texts that have either significantly informed your practice or otherwise retain high religious value. On the Mysteries, Hermetica, and The Chaldean Oracles are on my altar.

A small bench or shelf to elevate the most important iconography above other tools. Mine is a two-tiered wooden shelf that contains three primary icons of my “elevating triad.”

Religious clothes reserved for worship help to put you in the mental state for prayer. They can also more easily be kept clean when not worn for work or other non-religious activities. These should be loose-fitting, like robes, shawls, and head coverings. Since pursuing unity with God means distancing yourself from the body, loose and flowing clothing helps you feel less restricted. I wear a robe, a headscarf, and a blindfold.

An adze for performing consecrations. I made my own out of wood and wrapped the handle in leather.

A censor to safely burn incense. Mine is made to be held and swung. I use incense cones of frankincense and myrrh.

A cushion for sitting during meditative prayer. I have a seat with a firm back to support my spine during prolonged sessions.

A lectern for holding the materials you will read from in prayer.

Musical instruments and a speaker to play hymns or melodies of the “Barbarous Names” (for more information on the “Barbarous Names,” go to **S.15**). I have a sistrum (a type of Egyptian rattle) as well as a portable speaker for playing pre-recorded religious music during rites. At first, I used recordings of myself, but I have since commissioned professional-grade hymns from musicians.

These are the things that compose my altar, and though you don’t need any or all of these things to worship the gods, I find them indispensable in my practice. Each of these things helps me to forget myself and contemplate the gods.

If you’re starting and need time to collect these sorts of items, you can begin with doing the “Silent Prayer.” The “Silent Prayer” was my only ritual for my first years of practice. Go directly to S.14 for details. Unlike the other rites, it does not require any materials to complete. If you perform no other rituals, perform this one.

Once you have the suitable materials to begin your worship, you’ll also need intellectual materials. This means finding the proper prayers, hymns, and other texts used in worship, as well as developing a manageable daily schedule. I’ll detail my morning, afternoon, and evening routines.

S.13

What kinds of prayer do you do in the morning?



*The splendid God, Lord of all the Gods, Amon-Ra,
Lord of the Thrones of the Two Lands, Foremost in 'Ipet-sut',
splendid Soul Who came to be in the beginning,
Great God Who dwells in Truth,
Primordial God Who engendered the first Gods,
through Whom every God came to be.
Most unique of the unique, Who made all that is,
Who began the world back in the First Time.
Whose features are hidden, yet frequent His appearances,
and there is no knowing how He flowed forth.
Gloriously powerful, beloved, majestic,
mighty in His theophanies, magnificent,
powerful Being through Whose being each being came to be,
Who began becoming with none but Himself.*

*Who brought light to the World at the Creation,
great Solar orb Who brightens the sunbeams,
Who offers Himself so that all human beings may live,
sailing about above without being wearied.
Early riser Whose ways endure,
Aged One Who rises at dawn with the vigor of youth,
Who reaches the ends of eternity, circles about the sky,
traverses the place below to brighten the world He had created.*

Hymn to Amun-Ra Cairo papyrus 58032, trans. J.L. Foster

There is no “orthodoxy” on selecting prayers or when they should or should not be performed. Some people prefer to write their own prayers, others take them from historical sources, and many use a mix of both. There are also a wide variety of contemporary books on various types of prayers and magic in the Egyptian style from which to pull.

I like philosophically applying Occam’s Razor to selecting prayers and creating a schedule. By this, I mean that I try to make the fewest assumptions and cut right to enacting the spirit of the ideas of theurgy and “divine mimicry” in the least number of steps. Based on my intuition, I have established different types of prayers for different times of the day.

Morning prayers, in my opinion, should be short and straightforward. Most folks have work, parenting, and other demanding obligations right at the start of the day, and so to establish and maintain a consistent morning prayer, having it take less than five minutes has important advantages.

Morning prayers set the tone for the rest of the day. This means they should have something simple and elevating at their core. Adoration of God and thankfulness to God are good places to begin.

In my case, I use a short excerpt from a *Hymn to Amun-Ra* from the XVIII-Dynasty Papyrus, Boulaq 17. It is admiring in style, identifying all of the roles, duties, and creations of Amun-Ra. As an additional devotional act, I have translated the excerpt into Coptic and perform it in the Coptic language.

I accompany this prayer with offerings of bread and water. I also include informal prayers involving symbolic offerings to all the gods represented on my altar. The following is a step-by-step guide for a morning routine of prayer.

1. **First**, take the food-offering bowls to the kitchen and fill one with water and the other with a piece of flatbread. If you notice that the washing bowl needs refilling, do that at the same time, adding a pinch of natron and a few drops of nard oil (or your selection of purifying elements). Place the washing bowl back in its spot at the altar if you needed to refill it.

2. **Second**, place the bowls with bread and water down next to where the washing bowl sits. Lightly dip your fingers into the washing bowl and use some water to rub your hands and face. Set the reading materials on the lectern so you can read the morning prayer, and adjust the lectern so that you will be facing the altar when you read from it.
3. **Next**, place the bread and water offerings on the altar before the three elevated icons of the deities if you have an “elevating triad” or whatever arrangement of iconography you have on your altar. While standing, keep your palms upward and recite the prayer. Direct your attention to each icon, speak the name of the deity it represents aloud, and succinctly describe the offering and its significance.
4. **Finally**, take the bowls off the altar, eat the piece of bread, and drink the water. Place both empty bowls next to the washing bowl. In this state, it is ready for use the following morning. End by saying, “Praise be to God,” and blow a kiss to the air.

This is the morning routine I use every day. If you like, you can mimic these steps and insert your own ritual offerings, objects, and hymn selections to suit your unique circumstances. Once you’ve got your mornings down, the afternoon is the next part to focus on.

What kinds of prayers do you do in the afternoon?



Following another system of ordering, he gives the first rank to Kmeph, the leader of the celestial gods, whom he declares to be an intellect thinking himself, and turning his thoughts towards himself; but prior to him he places the indivisible One and what he calls the “first product,” which he also calls Ikton. It is in him that there resides the primal intelligising element and the primal object of intellection, which, it must be specified, is worshipped by means of silence alone.

Iamblichus, On the Mysteries VIII.3, trans. E. Clarke et al.

Afternoon prayers, in my opinion, should entail the rejuvenation of one’s focus for the day. You will encounter adversity at work, in parenting, or daily responsibilities. Tribulation wears on our patience and grace. Restorative prayer can help you maintain a higher quality of concentration and a more positive, mindful state of being.

I perform what I call the “Silent Prayer.” **The “Silent Prayer” is a silent, meditative prayer** derived from the concept of silence in the *Hermetica*, which aims to emulate or mimic the ineffable nature of the “One,” or divine unity. It

involves visualizing aspects of a central deity, repeating the deity's name or epithets along with an "elevating phrase," and incorporating a physical movement or tactile engagement to affect an emotional, intuitive, or otherwise experiential result.

This prayer aims to strengthen your connection with God and refocus yourself upon the divine—away from the material. It can also help unlock and progress your powers of spiritual intuition and sensibility.

The only thing required is a clean or empty room in as quiet a setting as possible. I also change into specific clothes I reserve for prayer: a robe, head-covering, and blindfold. Special clothing for worship should be loose-fitting, so you can move more efficiently without interrupting your prayer. The *Hermetica* prescribes that this is done with no material offering. No incense, music, poems, additional prayers, food offerings, or religious offerings of any kind—just you, alone, in silence. If you are performing this prayer near a religious altar, I recommend facing away from it.

This "Silent Prayer" is something I derived principally from the *Corpus Hermeticum* Books I, X, XI, and XIII, the *Perfect Sermon*, the *Stobaeon Fragments*, and the *Definitions of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius*. These Hermetic texts reference a "divine" or "sacred" silence. In addition, I took inspiration from Iamblichus' *On the Mysteries, Books I, VII, and VIII*, where he says that "all superior beings rejoice in the efforts of their inferiors to imitate them." We should aspire to achieve "identity with the primal entities in form and essence" and that the highest principles should be "worshipped by means of silence alone."

1. **Begin by sitting cross-legged.** Other seated or standing positions also work, so try different styles.
2. **Select a divine name and "elevating phrase"** to repeat to yourself mentally. The "elevating phrase" is a command directed at yourself to spur your soul to rise upwards towards God. It is essential not to speak this aloud. I use Amun-Ra as the divine name, and to keep things simple, I use the word "elevate" as the elevating phrase. It happens that the deity I have selected and the elevating

phrase have the same number of syllables, so in my head, I can almost sing them to myself, interchanging the words in rhythm. Whatever combination you select of deity name and elevating phrase, I'd say it's generally ideal for them to have a rhythmic quality combined.

3. **Close your eyes**, push your eyeballs upward in your head, and repeat the divine name and elevating phrase to yourself silently. If you don't want to push your eyeballs upward, other physical movements may help. Prayer beads can be used to keep a record of your repetitions, or you can rock your body in a swaying rhythm. Allow yourself to forget everything besides the deity.
4. **Do this either until you naturally feel you wish to stop**, or program a gentle alert of ocean waves or shimmering chimes on your phone, set to go off after 10, 15, or 20 minutes.

The summary experience of this prayer for me is what I can only describe as a sense of "heightened-ness" or "excellence." I feel a sensation similar to floating upwards in water after several minutes of the "Silent Prayer." Towards the end of the prayer, I often experience a feeling of a pleasant warmth upon my forehead, as if I was sitting in a sunbeam. This is the extent to which I have experienced "gnosis," or a kind of personal, sacred knowledge or state of knowing. Allow yourself to feel whatever you feel during this experience.

After participating in something like the "Silent Prayer," you should feel rejuvenated, more connected with the divine, and prepared to continue your daily responsibilities. This can carry you into the evening when you can complete your daily prayer schedule.

§.15

What kinds of prayers do you do in the evening?



For you inquire, “what is the point of meaningless names?” But they are not “meaningless” in the way that you think. Rather, let us grant that they are unknowable to us—or even, in some cases, known, since we may receive their explanations from the gods—but to the gods they are all significant, not according to an effable mode, nor in such a way that is significant and indicative to the imaginations of human beings, but united to the gods either intellectually or rather ineffably, and in a manner superior and more simple than in accordance with intellect. It is essential, therefore, to remove all considerations of logic from the names of the gods, and to set aside the natural representations of the spoken word to the physical things that exist in nature. Thus, the symbolic character of divine similitude, which is intellectual and divine, has to be assumed in the names. And indeed, if it is unknowable to us, this very fact is its most sacred aspect: for it is too excellent to be divided into knowledge. But as for those names of which we have acquired a scientific analysis, through these we have knowledge of divine being, and power, and order, all in a name! And, moreover, we preserve in their entirety the mystical and arcane images of the gods in our soul; and we raise our soul up through these towards the gods and, as far as is possible, when it has been elevated, we experience union with the gods.

Iamblichus, On the Mysteries VII. 4, trans. E. Clarke et al.

The evening prayer can be an opportunity to explore more involved forms of worship. In the mornings and afternoons, obligations might steal us away from more extended prayer sessions, but evenings often give us more time to work with. For this reason, evening prayers should be more elaborate. They should offer closure to the day in the style of a big finale.

The final prayer of the day for me is musical and involves reciting something called the “Barbarous Names.” These are mixed-up forms of the names of various deities, holy phrases, palindromes, and extended sequences of vowels, which were composed or divined in antiquity as sacred sounds of ecstatic union. These inexplicable tones can create music by combining these sounds in the style of droning, chanting, or singing.

Iamblichus speaks to the power of the “Barbarous Names” in *Book VII* of *On the Mysteries* but says that to retain their full potency, they “must not be changed.” I have constructed songs that feature the “Barbarous Names” by referring to an old collection of Greco-Egyptian magic, called the *Greek Magical Papyri*, that feature them among their spells. I search for the names of deities in these texts and use them precisely as they are written as lyrics. Suppose the deity I want to honor is not directly mentioned. In that case, I use the *interpretatio graeca*, or the Greek translations of gods across different cultures, to match the deity with its counterpart that is present in the text. Amun corresponds to Zeus, Horus to Apollo, Thoth to Hermes, and so on.

Another aspect of the “Barbarous Names” is the use of vowels interspersed between the sacred names and phrases of the names of the gods. These vowels are generally attested to as A, long E, short E, I, long O, short O, and U. When arranging your music, you can use these vowels to complete musical sections which may not otherwise perfectly accommodate the varying lengths of the sacred names and phrases.

Chanting or other religious music styles are equally appropriate if you forego the “Barbarous Names” altogether. Take a simple melody, adapt a historical prayer or hymn, or create your own lyrics. It is also appropriate to take prayers you already use and adjust them to be musical. If you play an instrument or have other musical talents, use these to enrich your worship.

Once you have created the music you want, you can use it in the rite. In my case, I have made three songs in the style of “Barbarous Names,” one for each of my three “elevating triad” deities. Each piece is about two minutes long, and before getting them professionally produced, I used to sing them myself. I hired a professional singer, instrumentalist, and audio technician to give each song a high-quality sound. I have a wireless, portable speaker with these songs downloaded and keep it with the reading materials on the lectern. I also printed out a copy of the lyrics of each piece to keep on the lectern with the other prayer materials.

1. **To begin**, approach the altar and perform the same cleansing as in the morning by dipping your fingers into the washing bowl and using the water to rub your hands and face. Once clean, prepare the printed lyrics to each song on the lectern and turn the portable speaker on.
2. **Next**, take the adze and censer from their places on the altar, and keep them on or near the lectern. Take an incense cone, place it inside the censer, and use a long lighter to burn it. Swing the censer a few times to oxygenate the fire so it produces its aroma.
3. **Finally**, while standing at the lectern, hold the adze in your right hand and point it towards the icon of each deity while speaking the names of the gods each icon represents. You can add epithets to their names to honor them further. Press the play button on the portable speaker with the left hand, which starts the first song. With the right hand still holding the adze, point it towards the icon of the deity for whom the song is playing. When the song changes to the music of the next deity, point the adze at the appropriate icon of the god.

Pick up the censer in your left hand and swing it rhythmically to the music.

Sing along with the lyrics as the music plays if you wish.

My portable speaker plays throughout each song, and when the third song is finished, it automatically returns to the first song to play through the same songs again in a looping manner. Often, I will go through three cycles of the playlist until the room is filled with music and aroma. You can keep going through as many cycles as you want—however, I would never stop in the middle of a cycle. Before stopping, I wait until the third song for the third deity is over. End by saying, “Praise be to God,” and blow a kiss to the air.

This concludes the rites of a typical day. However, there is a unique rite that does not occur daily but can be used on special occasions, weekends, or times when an altar and its icons must be refreshed. This rite is called “The Opening of the Mouth.”



S.16

What is the “Opening of the Mouth,” and how do you do it?



The “Opening of the Mouth” is a ritual of consecration. It was used both in the process of mummification as well as the process of icon-making. To “open the mouth” of an icon is to ritually “open” it to be a seat for the divine. You are ritually preparing the icon to “hold” a special divine power within it so that a divine presence may linger when you have sufficiently called your soul to its attention in prayer. It is meant to empower your prayer sessions and invite higher experiences of “gnosis.”

It isn’t clear how necessary this rite was historically considered in circumstances of personal piety. I use this rite as a “refresher” for my altar and icons. I typically perform it on weekends when I have extra morning time, although I haven’t found a consistent place for it in the logistics of my praxis. For now, it is a rite for “special occasions” or when there is more time for prayer than the average day.

The “Opening of the Mouth” rite uses a specific prayer and the adze. The version I use of the “Opening of the Mouth” hymn is from Chapter 23 of the Book of Coming Forth by Day *Papyrus of Amenhotep II*, which has the advantage of being succinct, yet it does not sacrifice meaning. Just as I did with my excerpt of the *Hymn to Amun-Ra*, I translated it into Coptic and perform it in that language as a devotional act.

1. **First**, approach the altar and cleanse yourself by dipping your fingers into the washing bowl and using the water to rub your hands and face. Go to the lectern and move it close to the altar, so you will be an arm’s length from the altar while standing at the lectern. Turn to the relevant “Opening of the Mouth” hymn printed material, and take up the adze in your right hand.
2. **After that**, begin by acknowledging the gods by name aloud. Touch the end of the adze to the mouth of the icon, and recite the hymn aloud. Afterward, speak aloud the symbolic item or items that you are offering the deity, and explain the meaning of the offering. Repeat this with all three deities in the case of an “elevating triad” or until all the relevant icons of the gods have been addressed.
3. **Finally**, turn on the portable speaker and play the “Barbarous Names” music or whatever music you have prepared. For each song, point to the deity to whom the song has been addressed. Unlike the evening prayer, I typically do not light incense or sing along with the music, but you can if you wish. As with all other sessions at the altar, end by saying, “Praise be to God,” and blow a kiss to the air.

This concludes the rite of the “Opening of the Mouth.” There may be other “special occasion” rites I will develop and implement in the future. For now, this rite, combined with the morning, afternoon, and evening prayer schedule, is enough to fulfill my praxis.

§.17

Establishing a praxis and further reading.



The usefulness of this guide lies in how you make it your own. All of what I have detailed are the essential building blocks of theory and practice you need to begin worship with a necessary fullness of faith. Once you establish a routine of prayer, reading, and devotional acts, you'll have the confidence and intuition to continue building.

I am also providing a list of the literature I've read across various topics within the categories of "Ancient Egyptian religion" and "antique religious philosophy." Every book I recommend is one I've read through from front to back and found value. I will continue using these texts to inform my practice and always look for more literature to add to this collection.

The work of worship is never truly done, so we must continue to learn, pray, create, and humble ourselves before the gods. God bless you on your path to *henosis*.

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§.18

Glossary.



God – Often associated with modern monotheistic religions, “God” is typically taken to mean “The One God [of Abraham].” In an Egyptian polytheistic context, “God” in this singular form has been used since the beginning of Egyptian history, despite the Egyptians having an enormous multitude of distinct divinities. The meaning encompasses all of the divine. “God” means God, god, the god, a god, the relevant god, all the gods, the divine, the One, and the many other ways in which the divine “All” and “Beyond Being” are imagined.

The One – In Neoplatonic religious philosophy, “The One” indicates the ultimate, ineffable source of reality beyond all categories and distinctions, meaning it is beyond *being itself*. In this regard, it can be said to be “super-existent,” and because it exceeds the quality of existence, nothing can be said of it. The Egyptian theological analog of this concept is called the Nun, the unknowable “dark sea,” the source of existence itself. This is a critical feature in the idea of divine unity.

Noetic – a Neoplatonic version of the term “heavenly.” In Neoplatonic religious philosophy, the “noetic realm” is a realm of pure idea, thought, or intellect, which contains all eternal and unchanging truths. A kind of “ultimate reality” which acts as a heavenly image, while the material world is a secondary realm that acts as an imperfect mirror or reflection of the heavenly image.

Gnosis – “sacred, personal knowledge” which has its source in the divine. It is revealed from within us through direct communion with the divine. In practical terms, this can come in the form of feelings, intuition, ideation, visions, and other messages considered holy in nature, gained through a religious experience.

Theurgy – a philosophical understanding of prayer and religious rite, where the practitioner seeks to align their soul with God by “mimicking” the gods’ eternal actions. By understanding prayer as “divine mimicry,” one enlists the help of divine intermediaries (conceived of as angels or benevolent spirits), which help lift the practitioner’s soul upward toward God. Through this friendship and “ritual identification,” the soul ascends.

Demiurgy – to engage in various levels of creativity and acts of creation in the style of the domains of the gods to gain likeness to the divine. These are initially mundane activities that take on religious significance when you fully engage them up Diotima’s “Ladder” of the ascent of the soul. By “creating a body” (‘body’ in this case, meaning ‘material thing’ which may be occupied by the divine), one makes a seat for the divine like the human body is the seat for the human soul. To be clear, “demiurgy” as a term is uncommonly used, so by using this term in this way, I’m taking the concept of “demiurge” (God-as-creator) and turning it into a concept of praxis—the art of “mimicking” divine creation, to progress one’s pursuit of likeness to God.

S.19

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